

[What To Do About the Rich?" Socialism](#)
[Marx At The BBC... Again!](#)
[What is Socialism?](#)
[What We Said And When](#)
[Every Migrant Is A Potential Socialist](#)
[Revolutionary Use Of The Vote](#)
[One Capitalist Kills Many](#)
[Ukraine: Two Nationalism Or None](#)
[There Is A Socialist Alternative To](#)
[Capitalsim](#)
[The Commuter's Lament](#)

Socialist Studies No 91, Spring 2014

What To Do About The Rich

According to THE INDEPENDENT (20th January 2014), the 85 richest people on the planet have accumulated as much wealth between them as half the world's population, some 3.5 billion people. The richest 85 people have a collective worth of \$1.7 trn (£11tn). Top of the list is Carlos Slim Helu, the Mexican telecommunication's mogul followed by Bill Gates. These 85 individuals live in just 13 countries of the world, mostly residing in the US and Australia.

The charity, Oxfam, want politicians to do something about the growing disparities in income and wealth between the rich and poor. In a report issued by Oxfam to coincide with this year's economic forum at Davos, it said:

...this massive concentration of economic resources in the hands of fewer people presents a significant threat to inclusive political and economic systems (loc cit).

Winnie Byanyima, Oxfam's executive director, who attended the conference at Davos said:

We cannot hope to win the fight against poverty without tackling inequality. Widening inequality is creating a vicious circle where wealth and power are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few, leaving the rest of us to fight over the crumbs from the top table (loc cit)

The charity's "solution" is threefold; "progressive taxation", "the rich ought not to use their wealth to control politicians" and employers should pay workers "a living wage", all of which is no solution at all. Such is the constant naivety of charities when confronted by the enormous and pressing social problems caused by capitalism.

And there are some very worried economists too. Jennifer Blanke, the Davos forum's chief economist said:

Disgruntlement can lead to the dissolution of the fabric of society, especially if young people feel they don't have a future. This is something that affects everybody (loc cit)

In other words, if the politicians do not do something now about the widening wealth inequality between the super-rich and the rest of society, there could be a threat to capitalism itself. Not a novel warning, though. Blanke's message to the rich and their politicians is similar to a remark once made by Quinton Hogg, father of Douglas "Duck Castle" Hogg, who, in 1943, alarmed the ruling class with his warning: "If you do not give people social reform they will give you social revolution" (quoted from, BEVERIDGE RE-ORGANISES POVERTY, Socialist Party of Great Britain).

The problem with charities trying to redress the very real problem of hunger and starvation is that they cannot think

outside the capitalist box. Without an understanding of capitalism and what makes the profit system tick, how can you possibly answer the question why poverty persists from one generation to the next? Nor can you ask fundamental questions facing billions of people throughout the world.

Why, for example, is there concentrated wealth in the hands of the few? Why is there poverty when the potential exists within the means of production to create abundance? And why do politicians do little or nothing to tackle the problem of poverty even though it might mean “*the dissolution of the fabric of society*”?

These questions cannot be answered without simultaneously proposing the abolition of the capitalist cause. And charities do not exist politically to question capitalism and to remedy its effects through social revolution. Instead they supply endless sticking plasters and gauze but cannot stop the bleeding.

The reality is that we live in a capitalist society where the means and production of social wealth are owned by a small minority to the exclusion of everybody else. We live in a class divided society where the working class majority produce the social wealth while a small minority, including the richest 85, live off the unearned income of rent, interest and profit.

The rich do not want to pay tax and governments are largely powerless to stop their accountants legally using schemes to avoid paying tax, progressive or otherwise, or for corporations and businesses to play one country off against another in order to secure favourable tax breaks or by paying no tax at all. However, taxation has never been a working class issue, just one of many property conflicts within the capitalist class. And just what is a “*living wage*”? It is as meaningful as a “*fair wage*” or a “*just wage*”; more theology than economics.

All wages, high or low, are a mark of wage slavery and class exploitation. The wages system is a form of rationing where what workers receive in their wages and salaries does not enable them to lead decent and worthwhile lives. That is why socialists have always pointed out to workers that struggling for higher wages takes place on an uneven playing field which they do not own. Instead of having to endlessly struggle for higher wages workers should seriously consider the socialist proposition “*the abolition of the wages system*”.

In short; the concentration of wealth, the poverty and the mounting discontent exist precisely because we live in capitalism. Capitalism is not about increasing equality and meeting people’s needs. Capitalism is a class struggle over the intensity and extent of exploitation where workers produce more social wealth than they receive in wages and salaries and where capitalists are constantly trying to extract more social wealth from them. And Capitalism’s overriding anti-social objective is to make profit, accumulate capital and expand value forever.

And governments and politicians are complicit in capitalism’s objective of profit making rather than meeting human need. Governments exist as the “*executive of the bourgeoisie*” not “*the executive of the whole of society*”, while politicians exist to serve the general and particular interests of the capitalist class; those who own the means of production and distribution.

That is what the annual beano at Davos exists for; as a talking shop to serve the interest of the employers not the working class. “*The Joy of Capitalism*” is the banner that flies over the expensive boutiques, the ski-slopes, the smart restaurants and the plush hotels and conference suites at Devos.

The organisers might indulge the whingeing of the charities lobbying there, but Davos is all about business, economic growth and making profit to keep the capitalist class in the style they are accustomed to.

And, yes, socialists would like to see “*a dissolution of the fabric of society*” only if, by this expression, it means the ordered, democratic and world-wide replacement of capitalism by socialism; the establishment of the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution of all society through the conscious and political action by a socialist majority.

[Back to top](#)

Marx At The BBC... Again!

Recently the BBC broadcast a short five minute introduction on the relevance of the ideas of Karl Marx to the 21st century. The programme was fronted by the INDEPENDENT Journalist, Owen Jones (1st November 2013).

The relevance for Owen Jones of Marx's ideas was vague to say the least.

First there was a reference to Marx's theory of alienation which Jones believed was something about workers not liking being employed. Marx gave a much richer and diverse explanation. In THE ECONOMIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL MANUSCRIPTS, Marx identified four specific ways in which alienation manifests itself under capitalism; the product of labour, the labour process, how workers relate to each other, and the denial to workers of creative expression in work.

And, second Jones linked Marx's ideas to the Labour Party concept of "*Social justice*"; which was a concept Marx repudiated. Marx said that you cannot have "*socialist distribution*" on the basis of private ownership of the means of production and distribution.

The programme was also let down by the contribution from the academic, Dr Elizabeth Fraser, Fellow in Politics at Oxford University, who was parachuted into the programme to make a "*balanced*" comment on Marx.

In her contribution she claimed that the central error made by Marx was to begin his analysis of capitalism with production. He did no such thing. In the first volume of CAPITAL, Marx began his analysis of capitalism with the commodity; and for very good reason. In fact, Marx wrote capitalism appears to be nothing more than an "*immense collection of commodities*" (First page of CAPITAL volume 1).

Marx then went on to give a detailed analysis of the commodity considering its use value and exchange value before turning his attention to money, the exploitation of labour-power as a commodity, production and finally capital.

Of course bourgeois economics begins with circulation, banking and consumption relegating production to merely one factor of the mystical "trinity"; labour, capital and land. This "*vulgar and apologetic*" change in emphasis came about in economic history shortly after Marx's death.

This reactionary sleight of hand, known as "*neo-classical economics*" allowed economists to avoid asking the questions Marx had asked about the production of social wealth and its distribution. Capitalism was now socially harmonious; trade unions were considered a tiresome monopoly while the profit-system was deemed to be efficient, rational and crises-free. Oh, and capitalism had no history; it extended back and forward in time as a natural entity beyond criticism.

Once Marx gets to production in his critique of political economy he shows that the working class generates a surplus value from which the unearned income of rent, interest and profit derives. Capitalists are just "*personified capital*"; mere functionaries of capital with little or no importance in the generation of social wealth. For capitalism's economists, then and now, this is a heresy.

However, if you begin with the markets, prices, the City and Banks, as most bourgeois economists do, it is finance and "*entrepreneurs*" which conveniently generate social wealth not the working class but no account can be given of the movement of capital from one crisis to another. An understanding of capitalism for economists becomes a closed book.

Capitalism cannot be studied and understood from "*mere appearance*" only from "*the power of abstraction*". But then Marx had already addressed the error of what he called "*the vulgar economists*" in his own day; in section 4 of Capital he called "*The Fetishism of the Commodity and its secret*":

...the vulgar economists confine themselves to systematizing in a pedantic way, and proclaiming for everlasting

truths, the banal and complacent notions held by the bourgeois agents of production about their own world, which is to them the best possible one (p.175)

Dr Fraser also pulled out from a shelf of books behind her a copy of Marx's CRITIQUE OF THE GOTHA PROGRAMME. What bearing this had on the programme was left unanswered. The German Social Democratic Party held its initial Party congress in the town of Gotha in 1875. The SDP, whom Marx was addressing in his pamphlet, had a political programme some of which he bitterly opposed like the reference to "*the people's State*". What Marx did not do was to reject "*democracy*" in favour of "*dictatorship*" which Dr Fraser implied by holding a copy of the CRITIQUE in her hand and waving it accusingly at the camera. In fact, in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, Marx had already stated that:

The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle for democracy

So how could she then claim there was a causal connection between Marx's small little group of communists in 1848 with Lenin's Bolsheviks in 1917 and the formation of totalitarian states in the 20th century? We just do not know, although we pity her students if this is an example of her teaching.

[Back to top](#)

What is Socialism?

Introduction

The working class is suffering from one of the worst economic depressions since the 1930's. There is high unemployment, cuts in wages and salaries and a Government austerity programme attacking the poor and vulnerable. There is also a war in Afghanistan and the Coalition government may still yet be drawn into the civil war currently taking place in Syria which has seen over 100,000 deaths.

We, the reconstituted Socialist Party of Great Britain, do not claim to have a solution to every social problem facing the human species but we do offer a solution to the social and economic problems facing the world's working class. And we believe that our analysis of capitalism merits a hearing, particularly what we have to say about how social problems facing workers are a direct result of the minority ownership of the means of production and distribution.

Furthermore, we say that socialism – the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community - cannot be understood without an understanding of capitalism and the revolutionary political process involving a world-wide socialist majority, both necessary to move from global production for profit to global production for social use.

Capitalism and Socialism

We live in a social system known as capitalism in which commodity production and exchange take place for a profit. Capitalism has not always existed. Before capitalism there was feudalism and before that chattel slave societies like the ones found in ancient Greece and Rome. Previous to class societies there was an early form of communism which lasted for thousands of years.

Under capitalism we get the things we need in order to live – food, clothing, housing, travel, entertainment and so on – by buying them. These commodities are all produced in order to be sold at a profit. The quality and amount of these commodities someone can buy depends on how much money he or she has at their disposal.

The lifestyle of the rich – the capitalist class - is far removed from the impoverished and insecure existence of the great majority – the working class. The former live from the unearned income of rent, interest and profit while the

latter live from having to sell their ability to work, or labour power, to an employer in exchange for a wage and salary.

The capitalist class are in a position to live a life of luxury and leisure because they own the means of production and distribution to the exclusion of the rest of society. And this ownership is protected by the machinery of government – the police, army and so on. In fact the State is nothing more than what Marx and Engels said it was in THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO – “*the Executive of the Bourgeoisie*”.

The capitalist State is an instrument of class rule. The capitalist class has its politicians to serve its interests, particularly over taxation and who is to pay for it, split into the three main parties; Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats as well as a myriad of smaller parties along the capitalist political spectrum.

The social wealth in society is produced by the working class. As a class they are paid less in wages and salaries than they produce in a given week or month. The working class produce both necessary and surplus labour time. The surplus labour performed by the working class is where profit comes from. Marx called this “*surplus value*” and it is the source of the capitalist’s profit.

The basic fact of capitalism as an unequal society does not change. When, in 1943, Lord Beveridge stated that “*80 per cent of the private property of the country is owned by seven per cent of the population*” and the “ECONOMIST” (25th December, 1943), endorsed his figures, they were only drawing attention to something that had existed and was known long before. It has gone on with little or no alteration. Britain’s wealthiest people saw their personal wealth rise to record levels in 2012, according to the annual SUNDAY TIMES RICH LIST, at a time when most workers’ earnings were cut, remained frozen or rose less than the rate of inflation. The combined wealth of Britain’s 1,000 richest people grew by almost 5 percent to more than 414 billion pounds (\$670 billion), the highest recorded by the 24-year-old survey. Some 77 members of the 2012 rich list were billionaires, two more than the previous record in 2008.

The aim of the Socialist Party of Great Britain is to replace capitalism by a world-wide social system in which the means of production would cease to be privately owned and would pass to the whole community. The socialist revolution would bring to an end the present competition for markets and sources of raw materials between the different countries that causes international rivalries and leads to war. In Socialism goods would not be produced for sale and profit but would be produced solely for the use of all society no matter where people lived. All forms of income derived from private property ownership: profits, rent and interest) would no longer exist.

The technical problem of production and distribution (economics is bound up with capitalism and its deliberate scarcity and under-production) faced by a socialist society would be the problem of democratically organising voluntary and co-operative labour into producing food, clothing, housing and all the other products and services necessary for the full life of human beings. All persons would have free access to the things they needed; production and distribution being in accordance with the socialist principle: “*From each according to ability; to each according to need*”.

Socialism cannot be brought about from inside the profit system through social reform measures. A world-wide Socialist majority of workers must consciously and politically replace capitalism with socialism through Parliament and the revolutionary use of the vote. A Socialist majority, through Socialist delegates, must gain control of the machinery of government to allow the smooth and safe transformation of production for profit to production for social use.

Social Reforms do not lead to Socialism

In our view there is only one route to socialism and the policy of dealing with social problems one by one is quite a mistaken one from the socialist perspective.

The task of socialists is to achieve a revolutionary change in the basis on which society is established. Whatever may be the merits of particular social reforms for dealing with this or that social problem they fail in their purpose

because they do not bring about a revolutionary change necessary to resolve the capitalist cause of the social problems in the first place.

Among the social problems workers face at the present time are the cost of living, the insufficiency of wages and salaries and the shortage of decent housing. However, these same social problems were facing workers over a hundred years ago. These problems will never be resolved under capitalism. The workers' struggle to get a better and more secure living goes on and on, but it gets them nowhere.

The description often applied to the social legislation of the years since the end of the Second World War is the “*welfare State*”. The National Insurance and Health schemes were drawn up in 1944 when the Coalition Government was in power, and the Tories, the Labour Party and Liberals all claimed credit for them.

The reconstituted Socialist Party of Great Britain does not claim any part of the responsibility for the so-called Welfare State. National Insurance and the Heath Service were intended to remove the social problems associated with working class poverty but they have done no such thing. The capitalist class and their politicians have been saddled with a huge problem of how to pay for these reforms and this has led to periodic cuts, austerity programmes, denigrating sections of the working class as “*scroungers*”, and the creation of a bureaucratic managerial pyramid which has nothing in common with the socialist aim to abolish the profit system in which the rich and poor exist.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain and Leadership

It is legitimate to ask political parties what promises they have made to the electorate and whether they have kept their promises.

The breaking of election promises by the major political parties is not an accident but is inevitable while capitalism remains in existence.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has never made promises that it will solve the problems of the workers within the Capitalist system.

Nor does the Socialist Party of Great Britain offer to act as leaders; no leader can solve the workers' problem for them. The workers have to solve their problems for themselves by making the effort necessary to understand how capitalism works, and how it can be replaced by socialism.

What is required is not a trust in leaders and their promises but an attitude of self-reliance and a determination to understand the nature of the problems themselves. The working class, who are the vast majority of the population, have the great task of achieving socialism and thus enabling the human species to take a step forward in social progress.

We have only been able to give a brief outline of the necessity for the working class to organise consciously and politically to establish socialism. Socialism and host of other related topics can be found on our web site, in our pamphlets and in the quarterly edition of SOCIALIST STUDIES which carries the S.P.G.B's *Object and Declaration of Principles*.

The working class face two options. First, workers can continue to give their support to capitalism by either voting for capitalist politicians or remain apathetic and not vote at all. This option means they and their children will continue to face poverty, discomfort, social alienation, class exploitation, periods of high unemployment and the pain and destruction of capitalism's wars. Second, workers can read our literature, think for themselves, question, and stand in line for no one. Workers can challenge what we write but if they happen to agree with us then they must act and become socialists and join with like-minded men and women to begin the political process to replace capitalism with socialism.

IS CAPITALISM THE “LEAST WORST SYSTEM” WE’VE GOT?

The Labour leader Ed Miliband recently said he had nothing against the rich - as long as they made their money "*the hard way*", adding he felt capitalism was "*the least worst system we've got*" but "*needed saving from itself*" (HUFFINGTON POST 15th. Sept. 2012). It was a particularly ignorant statement. The rich do not make their money "*the hard way*" but through exploiting the working class in the production process and paying the workers less in wages and salaries than the social wealth they actually produce. And, at present, capitalism is the **only** system we have got; it exists in Cuba, China, Vietnam and North Korea just as it exists in Europe, Japan and the US. Capitalism is an integrated worldwide social system where the means of production and distribution are owned by a minority capitalist class to the exclusion of the rest of society.

Miliband is also in thrall to Thatcher's "*aspirational society*" but he admits that it not for everyone so politicians have to harness the "*creativity*" of the profit system for all. And he ended his speech by saying "*While there's capitalism, there'll be socialism, because there is always a response to injustice*". Again this is pure waffle. Socialism can only exist if capitalism is first abolished. You cannot have equitable distribution of goods and services based upon capitalist production for profit. Capitalism cannot be reformed into something it can never be; a society meeting the needs of everyone. Nor is capitalism "*creative*". It is the workers who are creative and they also run capitalism from top to bottom albeit in the interests of another class. Socialists want the working class to be aspirational; to aspire to a way of life beyond the wages system, to aspire to a society in which production and distribution takes place just to meet human need through the cooperative social labour of free men and women.

[Back to top](#)

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

FACT SHEET 7

LECTURE 7th FEBRUARY 1987

WHY CAPITALISM WILL NOT COLLAPSE

What We Said And When

It is not necessary to deal with the pessimistic utterances of public men at every crisis ; it is sufficient to say that each period of trade depression produces the prophets of catastrophe. We may add, however, that those politicians and business men who foretell collapse now, are no more to be relied upon than the others who foretold collapse in past crises. They do not understand the workings of the system that they defend
SPGB Pamphlet. WHY CAPITALISM WILL NOT COLLAPSE, February, 1932

The fact is that under capitalism, nobody can safely predict the future course of events ; how long a depression will last, and how deep it may go ; how much the market will expand ; and how large future unemployment will be in the world as a whole and in different countries
SOCIALIST STANDARD, 1979

Capitalism goes its own way, in accordance with its structure and its own economic laws, with its inevitable cycle of expansion and contraction. Capitalists expand investment and production when it is profitable to do so, and contract both when it is not profitable. Neither National Plans nor free market forces alter the essential conditions under which capitalism operates.

WHAT THEY SAID AND WHEN

Its (i.e. capitalisms) downfall, root and branch, will be positively assured by a continuation of the War, for say, another year. That downfall will then be like an act of nature, and not dependent on the mental and moral preparation of the peoples of the world for a new form of society which must perforce, be completely social.
American writer – Herman Cahn «« THE COLLAPSE OF CAPITALISM »» published about 1917.

The most important fact in modern history is the breakdown of capitalism...there is the greatest possibility that the social revolution may take place in the immediate future.

William Paul, Prominent Communist Party member, Labour monthly, 15th February, 1922.

It is no longer a dying capitalism, but one already in the process of mortification
E. Varga in a COMMUNIST PARTY BOOK – the Decline of Capitalism, 1928.

I am perfectly satisfied that the great capitalist system that has endured for 150 years in its modern form is now at the stage of final collapse, and not all the devices of the statesman, not all the three-party conferences, not all the collaboration between the leaders can prevent the system from coming down with one unholy crash. They may postpone the collapse for a month, two months, six months, but collapse is sure and certain.
James Maxton, I.L.P. Member of Parliament, Speech at Cowcaddens, 21st August, 1931.

WE ARE ALL MIGRANTS NOW *According to the BBC, researchers have discovered stone tools in Norfolk, UK, that suggest that early humans arrived in Britain nearly a million years ago - or even earlier. The find, published in the journal NATURE (7th July 2010), pushes back the arrival of the first humans to what is now Great Britain by several hundred thousand years.*

Environmental data suggests that temperatures were relatively cool. This raises the possibility that these early Britons may have been among the first humans to use fire to keep warm. They may also have been some of the earliest humans to wear fur clothing.

These migrants have been referred to as Pioneer Man (what no women?) and were similar to our species by standing erect, using tools and being hunter gatherers. A foot print, more than 800,000 years old, has also been discovered on the Norfolk coast, one of the earliest recorded outside of Africa.

Pioneer Man was wiped out by an Ice Age which occurred about every 10,000 years causing depopulation. As the Ice Age receded more groups of humans arrived, eight further waves of migrants in total. Each group was to die out through exposure to bitterly cold weather conditions until the ninth, the present one, survived.

So we are all descendants of migrants although the last phase who finally stayed had one thing going for them; they were not greeted by the politics of hate from the anti-immigrant lobby blaming them for taking the finest flint and the best appointed caves.

[Back to top](#)

Every Migrant Is A Potential Socialist

Politicians and the media have declared that Britain is about to be “swamped” by a “deluge” of workers from Bulgaria and Romania who will cause untold misery to the “indigenous working class”; an example of the much-used politics of “divide and rule”. Politicians have long used immigration to split the working class against itself as it has successfully done so with the artificial divisions between old and young workers over pensions and competition for jobs; between those on benefits and those who are receiving low pay; and between those working in the public sector and those employed in the private sector.

One political group, Britain First, whose leadership is made up from members of “*a former patriotic political party*”, claims that “*white workers*” are “*second-class citizens in their own country*” and that that immigration is “*a time bomb*” about to “*explode*”. A particular vulgar leaflet has recently been published by this group, called “*England for the English*”. The group’s xenophobic content is anti-immigrant, in fact it is anti-anyone who cannot trace their lineage back to Celts, Belgians, Basques, Angles, Jutes, Saxons, Vikings and Normans and other migrant groups whose footprints have long since vanished from the shore of human history. As a slogan, “*England for the English*” is incoherent and meaningless. The “*English*” is an artificial and mythical social construct; an empty abstraction much like the “*Aryan race*” <http://archaeology.about.com/od/indusrivercivilizations/a/aryans.htm>

Socialists do not distinguish between workers living in one part of the world from those living elsewhere on the planet. All workers and their dependents, male and female, black and white, are all members of the working class and they all share the same social problems and the same interest in replacing capitalism with socialism. There is no “*indigenous white working class*” as though workers born in Britain have some stake in British capitalism and warrant special treatment by employers and politicians. They don’t. They are a subject class just like the rest of the world’s working class. And there are no “British jobs for British workers” just as there are no artificial distinctions between workers exploited within the wages system. Capitalists are quite happy to exploit cheap foreign labour under the banner of “*free markets*” and “*flexible labour*” markets” while moving production abroad to exploit even cheaper labour. But that is what capitalism is all about; exploitation of the working class and the production of more social wealth than the wages and salaries going to workers. Workers living in Britain and migrant workers both belong to the same class. What does exist is a world working class confronting the world capitalist class over the ownership of the means of production and distribution. And the class struggle knows no national boundaries.

Workers might be born in a particular geographical region of the world but they enter into definite social relationships over which they have no control. And for the majority of the population of the planet it means being born into the working class; forced to enter the labour market for employment, competing for jobs, housing and resources with other workers; exploited in the production process; sacked if not profitable to employ; replaced by machines if it is advantageous to employers; and forced by economic circumstances to migrate to other countries in order to find work.

At the end of the working week or month, workers receive a payment for alienating labour working for an employer which signifies nothing more than their wage slavery. And instead of acting in their own interest and getting rid of capitalism; the cause of their poverty, workers in their political ignorance blame other workers for the misery of their social existence. First it was workers from Ireland, then Jewish migrants, then Afro-Caribbean’s, then Ugandan and Kenyan Asians, then political refugees from what was once Yugoslavia and now it is workers from Eastern Europe – an endless blame-game; a blame-game which the working class lose time and time again.

The world working class does not own the means of production and distribution. It does not own raw resources and nor does it have trade routes, spheres of influence and markets to protect. The focus of political action for the working class is to become a socialist majority working within a principled socialist political party. Without a Socialist majority, socialism is impossible and the social problems workers face, like poor housing, will persist from one generation to the next.

A cursory glance at the history of migration into Britain from the 19th century to the present day shows a repetitive reaction to a non-problem. And migration is a non-problem for the working class because the real problem derives from having to sell their ability to work for a wage and salary. The problems workers face is not from other workers but from their subservient class position.

Marx and the Irish working Class

An attack on immigrants is not new. Marx and Engels were both aware of racism towards the Irish working class living and working in Britain. In a letter to two comrades, Meyer and Vogt, living in the US, Marx wrote:

Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps,

English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the "poor whites" to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A.

Marx went on to point out that this racial prejudice was:

...artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes

And he delivered this important observation about racism:

This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this" (Marx to Meyer and Vogt, April 9, 1870, Marx and Engels, SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE 1971 p. 22)

Racism persisted in Britain against the Irish working class but towards the end of the 19th century another group; Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, were identified for racist attack. Through the process of immigration, racism against the Jews became pronounced in many of the advanced capitalist countries. Some socialists thought that this type of racism was a hangover from the past and would die out as more and more workers from different nation states met, worked and lived together.

This was the belief of Frederick Engels. In his essay "*On anti-Semitism*" (GERMAN ESSAYS ON SOCIALISM IN THE 19TH CENTURY ed. F. Meckenberg and M. Stassen p. 251-253), Engels wrote:

Anti-Semitism is the characteristic of a backward culture...; anti-Semitism is nothing but a reaction of declining medieval social strata against modern society

Unfortunately, Engels's optimism about the gradual eradication of anti-Semitism was misplaced. Capitalism caused racism through social problems such as high levels of prolonged unemployment, competition by workers with other workers for jobs and poor and often sub-standard housing. An indigenous non-socialist working class would turn against any perceived external threat to their means of existence or employment.

The first response in the East End to Jews arriving in Britain to escape pogroms was one of sympathy. This was at a time when there were good economic conditions and little unemployment. However, by the mid-1880's, during what has been called the Long Depression, racist attacks started to take place in the East End of London as bankruptcy increased among small shop-keepers and unemployment levels rose for the workers.

To gain support from the working class, local MP's and journalists took the side of the "*respectable worker*" whose job, it was claimed, was "*threatened*" by immigrant labour. Between 1887 and 1888 pressure mounted sufficiently for the government to agree to a Select Committee of Inquiry into the issue of immigration. Local trade unionists shared platforms with Conservative politicians, with both decrying the "*Jewish threat*". In 1892, the Conservative Party, in an attempt to get working class votes, agreed to an Aliens Bill (see B. Schwarz, *Conservatism, nationalism and Imperialism* in POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY ed. J. Donald and S. Hall 1986).

From the turn of the century, anti-immigrant organizations appeared in the East End, most notably the British Brothers' League, which held its first public meeting –packed to capacity– in Stepney in May 1901. The intensity of the movement forced the government to appoint a Royal Commission on the Aliens Bill in 1905, which empowered the Home Secretary to expel any aliens found to be criminal, vagrant, impoverished or who lived "*under insanitary conditions due to overcrowding*" (see Gainer, B. THE ALIEN INVASION: THE ORIGINS OF THE ALIENS ACT OF 1905 a book that does not mention the SPGB or its important principle on the emancipation the working class as a precondition for the emancipation of all society, irrespective of sex or race).

What of those Conservatives today who want to restrict migrants from coming to Britain in fear of losing votes to UKIP? They are simultaneously supporters of the free market but against the free market. John Redwood a supporter of economic liberalism and flexible labour markets now decries migrants as causing low wages (THE DAILY TELEGRAPH, 9th January 2014). Yet if you believe in free markets, including the labour market, you want competition for jobs among workers to drive wages down; that is what the free-market is all about; reducing costs including the wage bill. Ideology versus political reality is sorely tested against the needs to be re-elected.

Unemployment, Racism and Capitalism

By 1900, the rate of unemployment, as a percentage of all trade unions making returns, was 2.45%. Two years later with unemployment getting worse, Cathcart Watson, the Liberal MP for Orkney and Shetland asked in Parliament: *“What is the use of spending thousands of pounds on building beautiful workman’s dwellings if the places of our own workpeople, the backbone of the country, are to be taken over by the refuse and scum of other nations?”* (INDEPENDENT 7 January 2014) Just where were these *“beautiful workman’s dwellings”*? In fact, the 1900 Housing of the Working Classes Act had seen only 24,000 Council houses built by 1914 most of which were spatially mean and visually utilitarian. By 1904 the unemployment figure had risen to 6% (*Board of Trade, Seventeenth abstract of labour statistics* [Cd 7733] BPP, 61 (1914-16), 322 in K. D. Brown, LABOUR AND UNEMPLOYMENT 1971).

Unemployment increasingly became a constant feature of working class life and politicians, from the Tories and Liberals to the Social Democratic Federation, courted the unemployed feeding off their fears or promising them unattainable policies of social reform, such as *“the right to work”* (The capitalist left, like the Socialist Party, still follow in this failed politics today). It is within this changed historical context, that the reference to race found its way into the fifth clause of the Party’s DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES of 1904, ironically published in the same year that Galton founded the Eugenics Society whose social consequences were not seen until some forty years later in Germany.

The clause stated:

That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex

The meaning of the clause was quite clear. Capitalism had not always existed and, subject to the conscious and political action of a socialist majority, would not always exist. All past social revolutions up to and including the revolutions which established capitalism had been revolutions displacing one ruling class for another. This would not be the case with a future socialist revolution. The working class by its own efforts had to free itself from the wages system from which its poverty derived.

To make sense of social problems workers first had to understand the class context in which these problems are generated. Such understanding will not be found in the deliberations of social reformers, journalists and political commentators like Ms Alibhai-Brown of the INDEPENDENT newspaper who wants the impossible; capitalism without the effects of capitalism. Only the framework of the common ownership and democratic control of production and distribution by all of society can ensure decent homes are produced for everyone and that production and distribution is used solely to meet human need.

Social Reform or Revolution?

In Alibhai-Brown’s recent article on the subject of Immigration she rightly opposed those denigrating migrant workers but then went on to say that the social problems facing the working class – unemployment, poverty and poor housing were the result of greedy bankers and government policy (INDEPENDENT 6th January 2014).

Ascetic bankers wearing sackcloth and ash and a Labour Government filled with like-minded Ms Alibhai-Brown’s is her solution which is no solution at all. When has a Labour government ever prevented an economic crisis or solved

the pressing problems of housing and poverty? As for Labour politicians and their contribution to xenophobic hysteria, who can forget Bob Mellish in 1976?

We cannot go on like this. I do not care what those on this side of the House, or the Opposition side or anywhere else, say. Problems at local level will become worse and worse for our own people unless something is done. All Hon. Members know that people come to their surgeries describing the most distressing conditions—terrifying conditions. People born and bred in their own constituencies have been on the housing waiting list for as long as six years. But, on the points system, one must give immigrants preference...People cannot come here just because they have a British passport—full stop http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Mellish,_Baron_Mellish

And of course there are others in the Labour Party who defend “*people born and bred in their own constituencies*” against migrants to protect the votes they receive from non-socialist workers. Already David Blunket and Jack Straw have embraced the Bob Mellish line and there will be others like them in the parliamentary Labour Party the nearer the next General Election approaches. Then it is back to support for free trade and free markets, including a free and flexible labour market.

In fact, periodic economic crises, poor housing and poverty are the consequences of capitalism and a class divided society. Economic crises arise out of the anarchy of commodity production and exchange for profit while poor housing and poverty occur because of the private ownership of the means of production and distribution. In short; these social problems take place because of the anti-social priority of capitalism to make profit, accumulate capital and expand value.

Once the capitalist cause of social problems is understood, the direction of conscious and political action of the working class would be away from the destructive influence of the xenophobes and the futility of the policies of the social reformers and, instead, towards social revolution. For socialists, all workers have the same potential to become socialists no matter where they live or where they come from.

Workers coming to this country from abroad are just as welcome to attend our socialist meetings and join our principled socialist party as are workers already living and working here. Socialists do not discriminate. All that we ask from those considering joining with us to establish Socialism is that they are prepared to agree with and defend the SPGB’s OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES within which we take political action. Only the emancipation of the working class by a socialist majority will “*involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex*”.

WHATEVER YOU DO, DON’T SCARE THE WORKING CLASS !

In a recent lecture, given to the political organisation known as Counterfire (another tedious splinter group from the SWP), the journalist Owen Jones spoke on HOW TO TACKLE SCROUNGERS. It was a predictable lecture from a leading light of the capitalist left ; renationalisation of the railways, tax the rich, a living wage and a cluster of *issues* to protest and march about. One comment by Jones caught the viewer’s attention ; and that is his use of *working people* rather than *working class*. To justify this expression he said that many who now hear the word working class are turned off because they believe they are middle class professionals. It appears sending children to a private school, reading a broadsheet and ordering artisan bread from that nice shop in Notting Hill, makes someone believe they are members of the aspiring middle class. So these workers keep on walking by with their fingers in their ears. Working class ? Isn’t that people who live on a ChHANNEL 4 sink Estate ; dole scroungers who engage in petty theft and indulge in a *penchant* for recreational drugs and casual violence. Not for us.

Well, if that is the case why not drop the use of the word *communism* because it was associated with Soviet Russia and dictatorship; abandon the word socialism since it was used to describe the failed policies of the Labour Party ; don’t refer to Karl Marx (leave that to the DAILY MAIL and THE DAILY TELEGRAPH) nor to Marxism because you will frighten the life out of people and they will think you are a supporter of President Obama or Pope Francis. Keep the political writing bland and keep it safe. And whatever you write or say about politics, don’t ever scare the working class into thinking for themselves. And while about it, why not go one step further and keep quiet about Capitalism. Don’t mention the capitalist class. Steer clear of using the word *exploitation* in political discourse. Pretend you don’t believe in the revolutionary use of the vote and Parliament to establish socialism. And whatever

you do don't use the expressions *class interest*, *class conflict*, *class consciousness* and *class struggle*. In fact don't say anything at all ; just become a vertiable Trappist Monk politics of silence and class capitulation.

[Back to top](#)

Socialism And The Revolutionary Use Of The Vote

The Revolutionary Use Of The Vote

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has a unique and revolutionary socialist programme contained in its OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. Unlike the capitalist left and assorted groups of anarchists, the SPGB states that the use of the vote by a socialist majority would send socialist delegates to Parliament to secure and convert the machinery of government, including the armed forces “... *from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic*” (Clause 6). The use of Parliament by socialists will ensure that capitalism can be swiftly and peaceably transformed into production for use under common ownership and democratic control by all of society.

The socialist principle of a socialist majority using Parliament to establish Socialism has been wholly rejected by anarcho-communists, situationists, council communists, anarchists, Trotskyists and various supporters of the professional revolutionary, V. I. Lenin. These groups all believe in the politics of direct action where the form of society they want to establish is created through and by “*the smashing of the State*” and the setting up of “*Worker Councils*” as autonomous centres of political power.

The politics of direct action feeds off demonstrations, mass strikes and factory occupations, including a “*general strike*”. Some advocates of direct action even advocate, riots and the construction of barricades, violence against the police and armed forces, and acts of terrorism (The Angry Brigade, The Weather Underground, The Red Army Faction and The Red Brigade, to name but a few), as a precursor to revolution. The utter futility of violence as a revolutionary aim has been recently documented by Jeremy Varon in his book, BRINGING THE WAR HOME: THE WEATHER UNDERGROUND, THE RED ARMY FACTION AND REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE IN THE 1960's AND 1970's.

Without question, Parliament and parliamentary action has been and is currently held in low esteem. Only one in four persons under the age of 25 voted in the last election and more workers are involved with single issue politics than in becoming members of political parties. It is now trendier to become an anarchist and take part in a menu of direct action issues than to become a member of a Trotskyist political party with its secretive inner council, leaders and the led, factionalism, splits and opportunism.

Socialists do not want workers to join capitalist political parties and to vote for capitalist politicians. The track record of capitalist political parties and politicians in solving social problems facing the working class has been an abject failure principally because when capitalist political parties form governments they have no alternative but to run capitalism in the interest of the capitalist class. The same social problems, like poor and inadequate housing, persist from one generation to the next.

The failure of capitalist politics to end poverty, war, unemployment and poor housing has been a contributory but wholly misguided factor in the resistance of workers to join a leaderless and principled socialist party that could make effective political change to their lives. The establishment of socialism through the use of a socialist majority gaining control of the machinery of government has been tarred with the same brush as the policies enacted by the Labour Party.

Critics of the use of Parliament to establish Socialism have constantly pointed to the policies and programmes of past Labour Governments which have either failed to be implemented or been indistinguishable in practice from those pursued by the Tory Party when in power. But when have Labour governments ever had socialist programmes or a socialist objective? When have Labour politicians and those who vote for them ever been socialists or understood the

case for socialism? The Labour Party has never been, is not and never will be a socialist political party.

Critics of the Socialist Party of Great Britain do not deal with the SPGB's unique socialist case for the revolutionary use of Parliament. The unique position of the SPGB is that a socialist majority understanding and prepared to take the necessary political action through parliamentary action can establish common ownership and democratic control of the means of production by all of society.

Instead critics of the use of Parliament as a means to secure a socialist revolution, pick over the bones of dead Labour governments and their failed social reforms like nationalisation, Keynesianism, abolition of child poverty, inadequate homes and other so-called "*bread and butter*" issues. Socialists do not advocate reforms nor hold a particular fetish for Parliament and its pomp and ceremony but instead socialist revolution. The SPGB only pursues a socialist objective not a list of reform measures. We are not the Labour Party!

The Labour Party and Parliament

The convenient but disreputable side-stepping of having to confront a sound and coherent socialist revolutionary strategy through the use by a socialist majority of Parliament to establish a classless and wageless society of free men and women, is evident in the writings of the late Professor Ralph Miliband. Ralph Miliband, who was sometime professor of sociology at the London School of Economics has recently been "*woken from the dead*" by a smear campaign launched by the DAILY MAIL against his son, the Labour leader, Ed Miliband. He was supposed to have been a "*Marxist*" and hostile to all that Lord Rothermere and his editor Paul Dacre hold dear; deference to ones betters and the moral certainty of a fictional 1950's conservative England.

Rest assured, there is nothing "*Marxist*" in the late Professor's writings and his use of "*working class*" to describe the basis of the Labour Party is as superficial as any Sociologist found at the LSE, then and now. Miliband's use of the expression, "*working class*" is narrowly defined to describe only manual workers or workers in industry. As an "*Intellectual*", Ralph Miliband would not have considered himself a "*worker*" nor those he taught in his rarefied political seminars, many of whom went on to lead Trotskyist political parties.

However, the working class is formed out of a specific class relation to the ownership of the means of production and distribution. A Marxian political concept of class would designate as a member of the working class anyone who is forced to find employment for a wage or salary or is dependent upon someone being exploited in the wages system. Currently the working class forms a majority in society whether workers believe they are members of the working class or not.

Miliband misleadingly described the Labour Party as "*Socialist*" in aspiration but went on to show in his book PARLIAMENTARYSOCIALISM, written in the early 1960's, that it's "*Socialist*" programme and social reform policies were ineffectual through either Parliamentary compromise or the actions of Labour government Ministers when confronted with the problems thrown up by capitalism.

Miliband believed that the Labour Party had a "*working class*" basis but the leadership sought to pursue a "*national*" policy; a One Nation politics, so to speak, in which there was a partnership or harmony of classes for a common end (see the last chapter, *Sickness of Labourism* p. 348). He did not see much hope for such a politics. In the final chapter of the book he said that any political party claiming to represent the working class but then is forced by circumstances to become something else enters "*a slow but sure decline which –deservedly – affects parties that have ceased to serve any distinctive political purpose*" (p.349). And the Labour Party has never served any distinctive purpose for the working class.

What Miliband did not say – could not say - was that the Labour Party from its very formation in 1906 was a wholly unfit organisation to establish socialism. The Labour Party did not and does not exist for that purpose. Miliband failed to recognise that capitalism and the needs of the capitalist class shapes and eventually destroys Labour government policy and in turn Labour governments.

What of a principled political party which is rooted in working class politics and does have a distinctive political

purpose in replacing capitalism with socialism? What about the Socialist Party of Great Britain?

Not that Professor Miliband was ignorant of the Socialist Party of Great Britain because he refers to the SPGB in a dismissive footnote in his book, erroneously stating we were formed in 1905. He obviously was totally uninterested in the SPGB because no reference is ever made in his book of our Marxian critique of the Labour Party.

This is curious, because Professor Miliband states that there are two criticisms made of the Labour Party in its failure to follow a socialist programme, one from inside the Labour Party and one from without which he then spends some time addressing. Yet he never once refers to the SPGB's long established and consistent criticism of the Labour Party which he could have easily read in the SPGB's MANIFESTO, first published in 1905 but which went through many new editions throughout the Labour Party's formative existence and in numerous articles in the Party's monthly magazine, The SOCIALIST STANDARD.

Instead Miliband hurriedly moves on from the footnote to chart the anti-socialist and anti-working class history of the Labour Party from being a trade union pressure group at the turn of the 20th century to becoming just another capitalist political party by the end of it.

The consequence of not reading a socialist critique of the Labour Party, to be found in the publications of the SPGB, is that in all 356 pages of his book he does not once grasp the real reason why the Labour Party continually failed the working class. The reason was clear to socialists then as it is to socialists now; it never was a socialist party in the first place.

If you are a Socialist what are you doing voting for the Labour Party?

And then there are the Labour Party supporters; the tens of thousands of foot soldiers whose electioneering in wind and rain brings into power political leaders who can only serve the interest of British capitalism. What "*Socialist*" critique do they ever bring to bear on their own Party for its support for wars, the use of troops to break strikes and the utter failure of its social reform policies to end poverty and prevent periodic economic crises and trade depressions with their attendant bankruptcies and high levels of unemployment?

There are those in the Labour Party who do understand that we live in a capitalist society where the sole purpose of businesses is to produce commodities and make a profit. However, these Labour supporters simplistically and naively believe that the "*moderation of their behaviour is the responsibility of government and that all excesses that they manifest are due to the failure of the Government to legislate effectively to contain them*" (John Hade, INDEPENDENT, 28th October 2013).

Governments are not umpires and the highly competitive global profit system is not a cricket match. Capitalism cannot be fine-tuned with better regulations and the revision of the rule book or the use of a heavy roller to create a level playing field and flatten out the wicket for the benefit of both sides. Capitalism is exploitive, brutal and unpleasant whether it is a free market or a highly regulated one.

Governments is "*the executive of the bourgeoisie*" not a regulatory adjudicator on behalf of society as a whole. The Government is a class institution with a role to serve the interest of the capitalist class which past Labour governments have carried out with such uncritical enthusiasm to the detriment of a non-socialist working class.

Why do Labour Supporters keep on voting for a Party that continually fail their own aspirations for a better world and those of their class? Surely all they need to do is pick up a history book on past Labour administration. The inability by the working class to learn from past mistakes does seem to lend some support to those who question the use of the vote to make effective change to society. But it is mistaken.

True, by using the vote against their own class interest many workers who vote for the Labour Party seem to be driven by a political sado-masochistic desire to be beaten with a metaphorical stick welded by a Labour politician rather than a Tory one. Nevertheless the vote can be used to change society in a revolutionary way; but it requires workers as Socialists acting in their own class interest not, as many workers currently do, give their support to the

Engaging in politics and the use of the vote

Do we get any contrition, apology, or self-doubt from Labour Party members for the historic failure of their Party and the harm it has caused both the working class and the socialist movement? None what so ever. The journalist, Joan Smith is typical of a Labour Party supporter whose hatred of the Tories blinds her to clearly see the reason for Labour's history of failure to meet the needs of all society.

In her column in the INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY, Ms Smith took exception to Russell Brand's recent childish rant on NEWSNIGHT and later in the NEW STATESMAN (October 25th 2013), when he declared that people should not use the vote because it changes nothing. Ms Smith complained that, as a Labour Party supporter, she had "*Knocked on thousands of doors and delivered thousands of political leaflets*". She went on to say that "*she did not have much time for people who complain endlessly but don't value democracy sufficiently to engage in it*" (27 Oct 2013).

Ms Smith went on to repudiate Brand's claim that voting doesn't make any difference because, she said, the Labour Party "*would not have imposed a bedroom tax, dismantled the NHS and destroyed thousands of public sector jobs*". On what planet has she been living for the past two decades?

The Labour government under Blair and Brown was introducing NHS reforms to make it cheaper to run with disastrous consequences for patients while imposing through a labyrinthine Stalinist bureaucracy a series of "*market-style*" reforms to keep costs down; reforms that the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition has just continued and built-on. There is nothing "Socialist" about the NHS any more than there is anything "*Socialist*" about the so-called "*Welfare State*". And between 1997 and 2010, countless Labour controlled Councils including the Labour Government either "*outsourced*" whole departments to private sector contractors or sacked thousands of State employees, this writer being one of them, in order to save money. If someone wants to experience a really vindictive, stress-inducing and unpleasant employer then they should work for a Labour-controlled Council.

And let us not forget war. In its last term in political office, under Blair and Brown, the Labour Party took part in four wars, one still taking place in Afghanistan where torture, humiliation and it now seems, murder of "*enemy*" combatants took place. The SPGB may be derided as "*The Small Party of Good Boys*" but at least our hands are not dripping with blood, nor have we compromised our socialist principles by voting for war, death and destruction.

That is why, while recognising the usefulness of the vote, socialists have always suggested to workers at elections not to vote for any candidate who is a supporter of capitalism. And to Labour supporters like Ms Smith we say that your efforts to try to get the Labour Party back into government fails to grasp why they were thrown out of political office the last time.

The Labour Party, like the Tories and other capitalist parties, can never run capitalism in the interest of all society; they have to attack the working class; they have to cut services in order to maintain British capitalism's competitiveness on the world market, they have to lecture workers for not being productive and working hard enough and will always side with employers to resisting workers struggling for higher pay rises and better working conditions.

As the Socialist Party of Great Britain wrote in the pamphlet, QUESTIONS OF THE DAY some 35 years ago:

In Britain, Parliament has a complete and secure grip upon the armed forces and government interventions in strikes and disturbances of past years have shown on who side they act. These were a forceful illustration of how necessary it is for the workers to obtain control of Parliament before attempting to up root the existing foundations of society. They further show that the only way to obtain control is by sending Socialist delegates to Parliament (Parliament, Ch. 2 Socialist Party of Great Britain 1978 p. 13)

One Capitalist Kills Many

In a bi-weekly arrangement, THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY magazine gives space to Tom Hogkinson of the IDLER magazine to air the trials and tribulations of what Marx called “*the petit bourgeoisie*”, a class squeezed in between large capitalist companies and the regulatory capitalist State. Hogkinson dislikes both multi-national and corporate businesses and the politicians who serve their interests. He sees both as impediments for a better society. In his December sermon (I ON S, 15.12.2013) he praised the anti-Semitic, G. K. Chesterton, who wrote: “*Too much capitalism does not mean too many capitalists, but too few capitalists*” (THE USES OF DIVERSITY, 1921). Mr Hogkinson wants us to all to become self-employed, each trading with one another.

Hogkinson, like Chesterton, yearns for a pre-capitalist past. In his later years, Chesterton pursued a politics which he believed would create an atomised world of buyers and sellers in which as many individuals as possible pursued the goal of profit. He thought such a society would wrest capital accumulation from both a few vastly powerful interests (such as “*Jewish banking families*”) and a monolithic State capitalism which he erroneously and persistently referred to as “*Socialist*” (for a demolition of Chesterton’s anti-Semitic ravings see S Mayer’s recent book, Chesterton’s Jews <http://simonmayers.com/2013/12/09/g-k-chesterton-and-the-stereotype-of-the-greedy-jew/>)

In a similar vein to Chesterton, Mr Hogkinson favours a global Federation of anarchist shopkeepers buying and selling in the morning, idly sleeping in their hammocks in the afternoon and indulging in “*education and merry-making*” in the evening. Such is the fantasy world of the anarcho-capitalist dressing-up his or her reactionary view of the world as “*libertarianism*”.

In the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, Marx did not see the petit-bourgeoisie as having much of a future. He wrote:

The small tradesman generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants – all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production (THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO AND THE LAST ONE HUNDRED YEARS, Socialist Party of Great Britain P.67)

And through ruthless competition and the centralization and concentration of capital, Marx traced out a tendency for fewer capitalists not more. In the first volume of CAPITAL he said that: “*one capitalist kills many*”:

That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the labourer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many labourers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralization of capital.

Marx went on to say:

One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop, on an ever-extending scale, the co-operative form of the labour-process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of labor only usable in common, the economizing of all means of production by their use as means of production of combined, socialized labor, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market, and with this, the international character of the capitalistic regime.

This process of the concentration and centralisation of capital is reflected in the current economic troubles of the modern high street, the site of Mr Hogkinson’s utopia of small shopkeepers and traders mirrored in Adam Smith’s economic dynamism of “*the butcher the baker and the candlestick maker*” whose self-interested profit-making lays the foundation for the good of society as a whole.

Under capitalist competition, notably from the internet and large conglomerates like Amazon and, terrestrially, from large supermarkets and commercial chains, the small shopkeeper is disappearing as quickly as the public house. The

family butcher and baker, to all intents and purposes, has long since gone from the high street although there are still some trendy “*I saw you coming*” artisans still hustling in Notting Hill by selling over-priced commodities to the bored Cameronian rich. As for the candlestick maker; the development in the techniques of production since the 18th century, particularly the discovery of electricity has largely meant his commercial extinction and replacement with mass-produced light bulbs by an estranged and alienated working class. Ironically, in the 1990’s what candle-stick production still existed, several companies used toxic wicks causing potential brain damage to users.

What of Adam Smith’s belief in the common good of society being met by the pursuit of self-interest in buying and selling. The candle stick maker has long since been replaced by the working class working in factories, like today’s Chinese workers producing light-bulbs. Several centuries after Smith wrote his bible for the capitalist class no one knows how many workers, young or old, who have been killed or maimed as a result of being forced to work in capitalism’s factories, mines, building sites and farms; hundreds of thousands maybe, the figure could even run into the millions since diseases like asbestosis will still be killing workers during the middle of this century. According to World Health Organisation of the United Nations over 100,000 people die of asbestos related diseases each year (www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs343/en/).

Of the actual numbers killed by capitalism since Adam Smith’s pin-making factory extolling the virtue of productivity, it seems that no economist cares; no labour market “*supply and death curves*”. All is just fine and dandy in Adam Smith’s world of the invisible hand where social harmony prevails as capitalists pursue their self-interest; thus the irony in Marx’s phrase “*one capitalist kills many*”. The free-market institutes worshipping at the altar of Adam Smith are silent on this class genocide.

As for the workers now producing light bulbs, a news report in May 2009 noted:

Large numbers of Chinese workers have been poisoned by mercury, which forms part of the compact fluorescent light bulbs. A surge in foreign demand, set off by a European Union directive making these bulbs compulsory within three years, has also led to the reopening of mercury mines that have ruined the environment
<http://freedomoutpost.com/2012/11/light-bulbs-that-kill/#E34qovVLHRIYV0TK.99>

There is also the periodic economic crisis which afflicts both large scale capitalists and small traders alike. As the GUARDIAN recently commented:

The physical retailing sector has already seen 21,000 jobs lost since the beginning of last year because of the struggling economy and competition from the internet and the string of collapses includes Clinton Cards, Game and Peacocks (24th June 2013)

Marx also showed, that even under simple commodity production, the utopian world favoured by Adam Smith, G. K. Chesterton and Mr Hogkinson, economic crises trade depressions, and bankruptcy will still occur. There is no escaping from capitalism’s economic laws, even to the far-flung fantasy world of capitalist utopianism favoured by the so-called libertarians living their empty and tragic lives deep in the bowels of the Conservative Party. Throughout Britain small shops increasingly remain empty with retail areas “*becoming like a ghost town*” in which the only life to be found amongst the graffiti and the litter emanates from charity outlets, turf accountants and the ubiquitous fast food take-away found floating on a surfeit of beer in some gutter thirty minutes later.

If the tendency of capitalism’s anarchic trajectory from one economic crisis to the next is for fewer and fewer capitalists then on the flip side of the same capitalist coin, there is the potential for a majority of socialists to kill capitalism altogether.

As Marx wrote:

Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself.

Concluding:

The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. [This] integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.

As with most anti-socialists, Hogkinson writes-off what he perceives to be an alternative to capitalism as nothing more than a “*Socialist utopia*” in which “*an enlightened state*” exists to “*protect and guide its citizens*”. Socialism will be no such thing. Socialism will be a free association of men and women living harmoniously within the framework of the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. There will be no State in socialism, “*enlightened*” or otherwise. Men and women will democratically make their own decisions producing and distributing according to need. There will be an “*administration of things*” not people.

While rest, sleep and doing nothing are pleasurable human activities, work should also be a pleasurable human activity; the meeting of a human want and desire to be creative. After all, contemporary artists are prepared to spend hours and hours labouring on their paintings, conceptual installations and sculptures in the pursuit of meeting a human need for creativity. However, this artistic expression only takes place within the rarefied world of the art market in which the commodity production and exchange of artistic objects for the benefit of wealthy art collectors and gallery curators employed by the State.

What should be a universal human need is experienced under capitalism only as a minority act by privileged individuals from art schools. What capitalism denies to a majority of the world’s population socialism would free and foster as the realisation of a basic human need; the creation of a universal aesthetic dimension in the production of useful things. The powers and capacities of men and women should be richly developed in all their complexity not as discrete atomic events, but as Marx noted in THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, through the self-realisation of others where “*the free development of each is the free development of all*”. So it is to the practical Socialism advocated by socialists not the reactionary Utopianism of the IDLER that the working class should look to if they want a future in which social harmony, gentleness, and “*education and merry-making* will prevail. William Morris, writing of a socialist society in which art as a creative act of labour will be made by the people for the people, once remarked:

...Meanwhile, if these hours be dark, as, indeed in many ways they are, at least do not let us sit deedless, like fools and fine gentlemen, thinking the common toil not good enough for us, and beaten by the muddle; but rather let us work like good fellows trying by some dim candle-light to set our workshop[ready against tomorrow’s day-light – that tomorrow, when the civilised world, no longer greedy, strife-ful, and destructive, shall have a new art, a glorious art, made by the people and for the people, as a happiness to the maker and user (THINKING HANDS: THE POWER AND LABOUR OF WILLIAM MORRIS, P. Katz, p.287)

[Back to top](#)

Ukraine: Two Nationalism Or None

Why The Violence?

Violence has erupted in the Ukrainian capital Kiev with dozens of people being killed during clashes between anti-government protesters and police. The stand-off between the well-armed police and protesters along barricades is reminiscent to a stage set from Les Misérables and has swung between calm and violence for months. The violence escalated again on 18 February, with policemen being shot, and riot police moving in to clear the protest camp on Independence Square; since then over 77 demonstrators have been shot dead and 170 injured.

The protests broke out after President Viktor Yanukovich's government rejected a trade-deal with the European

Union in November 2013 in favour of stronger ties with Russia. The “*opposition*” orchestrated thousands of people into central Kiev for protests where they occupied Independence Square; a symbolic urban space of Ukraine nationalism

Several developments - including violent police attacks on student protesters, severe new anti-protests laws, and the abduction and beating of opposition activists - have caused the demonstrations to spread and intensify. For the demonstrators it is now an attempt to remove a pro-Russian President and his ruling clique and replace him with a President favouring closer integration with the EU.

For Ukraine’s ruling class, a group who favour closer ties with the EU; there is also another prize in removing the President. In Ukraine the fusion of business and politics is more the rule than the exception. Holding high legislative and executive office provides access to a patronage system, protection for business, access to public finance, and immunity from prosecution. The trough of un-told riches is the prize for those who eventually gain political power.

For example, Ukraine's richest man, Rinat Akhmetov, the main financial backer of the regime and a long-standing ally of President Viktor Yanukovich, was, until recently, a member of parliament. These privileges can give substantial benefits. Forbes.ua (the Ukrainian edition of the Forbes financial magazine) reports that Mr Akhmetov's businesses obtained 31% of all state tenders in January 2014. Mr Yanukovich's son tops even this, having “*won*” 50% of state contracts in the same period. Mr Akhmetov controls a group of around 50 MPs in parliament (BBC NEWS 21st February 2014).

Competing National Interests

Why is Ukraine important? Why the interest of the US government and EU ministers in its political affairs? The answer is simple. Ukraine’s importance lies with its strategic position in Eastern Europe and the wider conflict between the West and Russia. The Cold War never went away in 1991; just the political rhetoric in which the geopolitical rivalry was being fought.

For Europe, Ukraine is most important for its location, particularly as a transit state for energy — “*roughly 25 percent of the European Union’s natural gas comes from Russia, and 80 percent of that gas transits Ukraine*”. <http://www.eurodialogue.org/Russia-battles-with-Europe-over-Ukraine>

Ukraine’s transit role is also important to Russia, but Russia also has an interest in Ukraine because of other economic industries, like steel and agriculture. These industries have served as vital inputs for Russia’s economy from the Soviet era to the present.

However Russia’s interests in Ukraine go beyond the economic sphere. Ukraine is also important for military reasons; the Ukrainian city of Sevastopol is the headquarters for Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine’s strategic location as a buffer zone between Russia and Europe and “*its proximity to Russia’s own breadbasket and economic heartland in the Volga region make the country key to Russia’s geopolitical strength and, ultimately, its survival*” (ibid).

A strong Russia allied with Ukraine gives Moscow confidence and strength, particularly in dealing with Europe, while a Russia without Ukraine is weakened and left to confront a hostile West right up to its borders. Its leverage over gas supplies is therefore diminished and internal dissent against Putin’s government would intensify; particularly that section who look to Western capitalism as a model to follow.

Who are “*the opposition*”? What are their Interests? Who underpins them? And who gains and who loses? Begin to answer these questions and it becomes clear that “*the opposition*” has no bearing on the interests of the working class in Ukraine particularly those fighting the riot police in Independence Square. In fact it was interesting to note that the INDEPENDENT (21st February 2014) contained a pro-EU editorial aligning itself with the faction in Ukraine who are looking West. It is no coincidence that the owner of the INDEPENDENT newspaper is the anti-Putin and pro-Western multi-millionaire Oligarch, Evgeny Lebedev.

Those on the barricades merely naïve and deluded workers engaging in a nationalist struggle whose only winners will be either the ruling class who want closer ties with Russia or the ruling class who want closer ties with the EU. Even if Ukraine splits into two separate countries, the position of its respective working class will not change. They will not own the means of production and distribution but will remain wages slaves and exploited by their respective capitalist class.

From Nation states to No Nation states

As socialists have long argued, nation states contain a capitalist class owning the means of production and distribution with competing political and economic interests, political institutions and a coercive machinery of government to protect private property from internal or external threats.

Nation states also contain a working class who own nothing but their ability to work which they are forced to sell to the capitalists for a wage or salary. Within every country of the world social wealth is created by the working class. The working class are exploited in the productive process by producing more social wealth in a week or a month than they receive back in wages and salaries.

All nations of the world are capitalist economies within a world-wide capitalist system. Workers have no interest in the capitalist class who exploit them; they have no trade routes to protect, no raw resources to secure and no strategic spheres of influence to defend. A world capitalist class confronts a world working class over the ownership of the means of production and distribution. Workers throughout the world share the same class interests, take part in the same class struggle and share the same political need to consciously and politically replace World Capitalism with World Socialism.

This also includes the latent trans-European nationalism associated with those bureaucrats and politicians within the European Union who want to establish a United States of Europe. Early advocates of a United States of Europe included Victor Hugo, Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Liberal J. S Mill and the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin but more recently a unified European State has been championed by, among others, the former Belgium Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt in his book, “UNITED STATES OF EUROPE” (2005).

The EU project is a long way off from achieving its objective of a political union and an integrated State along the lines of the US. The recent problems with the single currency and the bitter nationalism unleashed in countries forced to accept harsh austerity programmes leaves the project somewhat in tatters.

Over the question of the United States of Europe the capitalists and their political agents are bitterly divided. The question of Increased European integration and a European State is largely a political not an economic one; and it is a question of no concern to the interests of the working class. Capitalism, operating with all its contradiction and conflicts either within a United States of Europe or within individual nation states, is still an exploitive profit driven system leaving the means of production and distribution firmly in the hands of the capitalist class.

Capitalists and their politicians seldom agree over a wide range of economic and political issues of what constitutes “*the national interest*”; from joining the Euro to what energy or transport policy to pursue. They are even divided during a war. In both the First and Second World War some members of the capitalist class were bitterly opposed to war with Germany. During the late 1920’s and 1930’s both US and Britain prepared for war against each other. The US even drew up plans in 1930 to bomb the main cities of Canada as part of a war plan to destroy the British Empire. There were opponents within the capitalist class of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Conservative supporting newspapers like the DAILY MAIL have opposed involvement in conflicts taking place in Libya and Syria.

The fundamental struggle in the world is not a nationalist struggle but a class struggle. The class struggle is a political struggle and it is the class struggle that politically moves one social system to the next. Socialists do not support one nation state against another. We do not support nationalist struggles any more than we support the Welsh and Scottish nationalists who want to cede from Britain.

However, socialism will not come by its own accord. Social systems change through the political action of men and women. The establishment of socialism is no exception. Only a socialist majority can establish Socialism. This means that socialists have to persuade workers to pursue the socialist objective in line with their own class interest and not give support to capitalist politicians. The national interest is not the working class interest. The national policies of the capitalist parties are not policies workers should support.

[Back to top](#)

There Is A Socialist Alternative To Capitalism

The Theory Of Marx

In his early years Marx was for a time editor of a German periodical Rheinische Zeitung. Whilst editing that paper he frequently came up against the problems he could not solve. Due to government censorship he was finally forced to resign from the paper; later he commenced a searching examination into economics and history, and the writings of people from Aristotle up to his own time. He spent a short time with Engels in Manchester going through the writings of the Utopian socialists. Gradually he found order in the apparent chaos of history.

A clear expression of his outlook first appeared in THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY in 1845; a criticism of some of the radical writers at the time. Then he put his ideas forward briefly in THE POVERTY OF PHILOSOPHY in 1847 and in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO in 1848. Finally, in a complete summary, in the introduction to THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY in 1859. The latter was the forerunner of his CAPITAL which was an example of the application of his theory to the production and distribution of wealth under the present capitalist system. A further example of the application of his theory was his 18TH BRUMAIRE OF LOUIS NAPOLEON published in 1852.

The following were Marx's fundamental propositions:-

- 1). That the economic foundation of a given society, that is the way in which wealth is produced and distributed, determines in general the outlook of that society regarding the conflict and relations of its members. However these conditions are themselves in the process of change and constitute the dynamic, the changing element in history.*
- 2). That there has been a social evolution in human history. New societies with different economic laws have grown out from old social systems, through a process of revolution due to the conflict between the forces of production and the social relations of production.*
- 3). That history, since the development of private property has been a record of class struggles and that all class struggles are political struggles as they ultimately lead to struggles for control of state power.*
- 4). That History is the result of the action of conditions upon men and women and the conditions in which they find themselves.*

From these propositions Marx defined four social systems as having been developed in the West. Primitive Communism – based on kinship, with property held in common. Classical society, as in Greece and Rome – based on production by chattel slave labour. Feudal society, as it existed in the Middle Ages, with a hierarchy of lordships at the head of which was the Emperor, King or Prince. And, finally, Capitalist society based on production by wage workers who own in general only their power to work which they sell to the capitalist owners of the means of production. The latter carrying on production for the sole purpose of profit (HISTORICAL MATERIALISM: A SOCIALIST ANALYSIS OF THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY, Socialist Party of Great Britain, p9-10, January 1975)

Capitalism is where we are today. It is based on commodity production and exchange for profit, where social wealth comes from the exploitation of the working class. Capitalists own and monopolise the means of production and live off the unearned income of rent, interest and profit. They pay for academic historians to write their history and their

myths, the primary ones being that there is no alternative to capitalism; that there is no pattern in history and that there is no progress.

Historians in Slave and Feudal social systems wrote similar histories for their respective ruling classes. Change still occurred. Revolutions still happened. And, through class struggle, one social system was replaced with another. Capitalism will be no different. It too will have an end in class struggle. The only question, to which there is no answer, is when? The answer to this question lies squarely with the working class.

(Introductory notes to the leaflet to the 10th Summer School of the reconstituted Socialist Party of Great Britain; TEN YEARS OF SOCIALIST ACTIVITY, 1991 – 2001: THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALISM, held at Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, June 17th 2001)

SOCIALIST STUDIES 92 AND SUMMER SCHOOL

The summer edition of SOCIALIST STUDIES will be largely devoted to the economic cause of the First World War, the principled socialist opposition to that war and the lessons that need to be learnt by the working class to prevent future wars. The content of the next edition of SOCIALIST STUDIES will tie-in with the June Summer School: “*A World Gone Mad*”: 1914 and Socialist Opposition to World War One to be held at Marchmont Community Centre on June 15th 2014, at 14.00hrs. . Entrance is free with Questions and Discussion welcomed.

[Back to top](#)

The Commuter's Lament

Each working morning thousands of commuters make their way to suburban stations and travel by train into the City. Huddled together on wind-swept platforms, accountants, solicitors, bankers and other office workers, try to keep themselves warm while waiting for the train to come... waiting, waiting, waiting.

When struggling to read their morning newspaper on a windswept crowded platform, matters are made worse for commuters when a page blows open to reveal a photograph of the Labour Party Leader, Ed Miliband under the banner heading “*The Squeezed Middle has a new champion*”.

The “*new champion*” has a plan. Do you listen to classical music, live in suburbia and send your children to a private school? Or are you the driver of the delayed train who enjoys nothing more than watching Premier League Football on an over-sized screen while drinking a pint or two of real ale in a pub on a Sunday afternoon?

If it is the former, then Ed Miliband’s wants to become your champion. He wants your vote. If you are the latter, then you may be the salt of the earth but you are not the type of salt Miliband wants at his Primrose Hill dining table.

Miliband has noticed that the commuters found on suburban train stations are insecure about their jobs, have lost their final salary pensions and in old age will be financially worse off than their parents and forced to live insecure and unpredictable lives. Ed Miliband thinks he can address these problems but he has as much chance of success as getting the trains to arrive on time.

Writing in the DAILY TELEGRAPH, a newspaper of choice for the down-trodden commuter, he writes:

The greatest challenge for our generation is how to tackle a crisis in living standards that has now become a crisis of confidence for middle-class families (January 13th 2014)

Crass opportunism springs to mind.

Surely for any socialist the greatest challenge of “*our generation*” is for a conscious working class to politically get rid of capitalism and establish socialism. However Ed Miliband is as interested in establishing socialism as Cameron

is in turning the Tory Party away from pandering to the rich privileged into a political party meeting the interests of all society.

It is as inconceivable for the Labour Party to be a “*One Nation Party of All*” as it is for the Tory Party to become a “*workers revolutionary Party*” and “*realise*” John Major’s classless society with its utopian landscape “*of long shadows on cricket grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs and dog lovers*” and “*Old maids bicycling to holy communion through the morning mist*” (Orwell). Capitalism can never be a society “*at ease with itself*”.

No mention is made in this bucolic utopia of the hard-working commuter and the trials and tribulations of being an employer in the second decade of the 21st century. In fact, the Tory Manifesto for the next general election is being written by three old-Etonians and an old Pauline, about a “*classless*” group of “*revolutionary*” politicians as the membership of an Oxbridge drinking club. And whoever writes the Labour Party Manifesto will bring to it no socialist content; its paragraphs will favour the rich and the powerful; those owning the means of production and distribution; the owners of the railways not the employers nor those having to use the trains as part of their unpleasant and tedious experience of the working day under capitalism.

The middle class is of course a fiction. The commuters at any suburban station might be experiencing “*a cost of living crisis*” and worry about the threat of unemployment but “*middle-class*” they are not. They belong to the same class as the woman in the railway ticket office, the train driver, the signalman, the ticket inspector and the low-paid immigrant, so despised by the media, dispensing coffee at the platform kiosk, but not those who own the trains, the railway lines and their place of work.

Commuters, despite their pretensions in believing they are “*middle-class*” are members of the working class; the majority in society forced to sell their ability to work for a wage or salary. They face the same problems of unemployment as any other worker. Redundancies in the City have been recently announced in the region of 60,000 here and 12,000 there, “*as though seeking consolation in numbers*” (Michael Moorcock).

And the commuter has come into the sights of the statisticians. According to the Office of national statistics:

Holding all else equal, commuters have lower life satisfaction, a lower sense that their daily activities are worthwhile, lower levels of happiness and higher anxiety on average than non-commuters... with the worst effects of travelling to work associated with journey times of between an hour and 90 minutes (GUARDIAN February 12th 2014)

Cattle or Sardines?

Orwell once wrote in his essay “POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE” that a writer should avoid “*dying metaphors*”. For too long we have read of “*commuters herded together in cattle trucks*”. Are cattle transported in cattle trucks anymore? Livestock are now transported in lorries whose conditions of transport are governed by strict DEFRA regulations.

Not so the luckless commuter. During the rush-hour there is often standing room only in cramped carriages where passengers are forced to exchange body fluids with other passengers; the sweat, the stale after-shave and deodorant and the stink of platform fast-food swirling around the carriage along with airborne diseases giving the opportunity for that well-earned “*sickie*” –a “*duvet-day*” at home. In fact, the suburban commuters face a daily journey not deemed suitable for pigs and cattle.

So what metaphor to use? Sardines come to mind. There is no fish called a “*sardine*” but is a generic title for 21 second-class fish, which you would certainly not find swerved at the dinner table at smart addresses in Primrose Hill or the fancy restaurant where the Tory Manifesto is being drawn up. Pilchards yes; sardines, no...unless of the Cornish variety.

The experience of the commuters forced to travel to and from London each day bears a marked resemblance to the illustration of the Brookes slave ship whose plans were published in 1788 showing slaves who were packed like

sardines in the lower deck of the ship for the profit of their owners; “*packed like sardines*”; a metaphor from slavery to wage slavery, so to speak.

The Commuter’s Lament

One “*underground poem*” commuters will not see on their daily grind to and from wage slavery is the poem “THE COMMUTER’S LAMENT” by Norman Colp. When the poem was posted up on the New York Subway it led to an angry response from passengers who did not want to be reminded of the reality of their daily existence under capitalism. The poem read as follows:

*Overslept,
So tired,
If late,
Get fired.
Why bother?
Why the pain?
Just go home,
Do it again.*

The unpleasantness of being a commuter was not lost on the novelist Sloan Wilson, either. In his novel, THE MAN IN THE GRAY FLANNEL SUIT (1955), Wilson succeeded in teasing-out the tension between the illusory dream of suburban comfort and aspiration of the commuter with the reality of the stress, conformity and pressure of the working day.

This tension is bought out in the protagonist Tom who tries to mask the reality of his life as an office worker with the hedonistic drive for money; the creation of comfort and order within a world of discomfort and chaos. Like the commuters on their way to the city he wants to escape his daily reality through the promise money will give to him:

And an island of order obviously must be made of money, for one doesn’t bring up children in an orderly way . . . or dress in an orderly way, or think in an orderly way without money. Money is the root of all order

Of course his “*island of order*” is a fantasy – where the dream of money to open the door to “a world of commodities” is one the politicians and the advertising companies are happy to sell like snake-oil salesman; the empty world of life-style consumption and the aspiration to succeed, in which the object to life is to have and to have and to have.

And the commuter workers standing each morning at suburban stations encapsulate that conformity, where easy money is seen as an escape route from chaos and unpredictability of their lives in the city.

Of course money is no escape; it is not “*the root of all order*” but it’s opposite. As Marx noted:

Money, then, appears as this distorting power both against the individual and against the bonds of society, etc., which claim to be entities in themselves. It transforms fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, idiocy into intelligence, and intelligence into idiocy (THE POWER OF MONEY, Economic and philosophical Manuscripts, 1844)

To either repetitively experience daily life on the suburban platform with its inhuman journey to and from a place of exploitation or to lead a creative and worthwhile life as free human being is the question to be answered. And the answer requires no “*champions*”, no political leaders but, instead, conscious and political action from a socialist majority. Socialism really is the answer to the questions posed each day to the commuter: “*why bother?*” and “*why the pain?*”

THE SPGB & THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has always insisted on the necessity for the workers to gain control of the machinery of government before attempting to establish socialism. The private means of production and distribution are protected by State force from both internal and external threat. There has never been a parliamentary test of the power of socialist delegates acting on instructions given to them by a socialist majority. And here we are talking about a majority of socialists who understand and agree with the case for socialism. In Britain, Parliament has complete and secure control over the armed forces. The use of troops by past Tory and Labour governments to use the army in order to break strikes demonstrates whose side the State takes in industrial disputes.

The use of the machinery of government against workers by both Tory and Labour governments demonstrates the necessity for workers to gain control of Parliament before attempting to establish socialism. And this can only be achieved through a socialist majority sending socialist delegates to Parliament to secure a majority there and ensure the peaceful transformation of capitalism to socialism. The attitude of the Socialist Party of Great Britain on the need to gain control of the powers of government including the armed forces has been logical and consistent. The SPGB holds the same view as Marx did as to the need of the workers to gain control over the political machinery before they can establish socialism. And in countries like Britain it is the revolutionary use of the vote that can give them that control not the politics of “*extra parliamentary action*”.

One final point: the one way to prevent capitalists from using political power against workers is to stop voting for their politicians and political parties at elections. The SPGB has always urged workers not to vote for any candidate who is a supporter of capitalism “...*whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist...*” (Clause 8, DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES). And this includes the Left Unity and its reformist programme it uses to try to gain support from a non-socialist working class. After all it is not a “*mass Party of working class Party*” which will be politically effective but a “*mass Socialist Party of the working class*”, made up of workers understanding and wanting the establishment of free and co-operative voluntary labour just producing to meet social need.

[Back to top](#)

Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

[Back to top](#)

email: enquiries@socialiststudies.org.uk | www.socialiststudies.org.uk